

## Castle Byers by Gazyrlezon

**Category:** Dark Tower - Stephen King, Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Gen, I mean really it's just that Will takes Jake's place at the waystation, Sort-of crossover, it's very much Will-centric, not sure if I'll continue this or not, you can probably read this even if you've got no idea what the dark tower is

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Roland Deschain, Will Byers

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**Summary:**

Will hated himself for it, but it seemed that his memories had bid him goodbye when he'd come here. Oh, he could still remember Hawkins all right, could still see his mother and his brother, still knew how the DnD table looked with the party assembled, could still picture Mike's smile ... but what was the name of the boy who always followed Troy around and took part in hurting them? Had he been going to Hawkins Elementary School or was he already old enough to visit Middle School?

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When the gunslinger reaches the waystation in the Mohaine desert, there's a boy called William Byers there who's struggling to remember where he came from

## Castle Byers

Will Byers scrambled to hide when he saw the gunslinger approaching. He'd barely eaten for days and it was a struggle for him to even get a coherent thought through his mind, but even so he knew that the man was dangerous. And he could still tell himself that he wouldn't give up quite this easily. Besides, he'd survived the visit of the man in the black robes, too, so what of it?

Behind the rough wooden planks that did a poor job of keeping him hidden, Will Byers told himself that he was safe. He told himself that somewhere there'd be an end to it. He'd seen the old rusty water pump outside, after all, maybe if he dug down there for long enough, made a deep enough hole it'd lead him somewhere ...

Where, though? Will hated himself for it, but it seemed that his memories had bid him goodbye when he'd come here. Oh, he could still remember Hawkins all right, could still see his mother and his brother, still knew how the DnD table looked with the party assembled, could still picture Mike's smile ... but what was the name of the boy who always followed Troy around and took part in hurting them? Had he been going to Hawkins Elementary School or was he already old enough to visit Middle School? And what, in God's name, was a *faggot*? Will felt a nasty feeling surrounding the word, and he had a vague idea that'd been important once, or that maybe Troy had used it to hurt him, but other than that? Just ... nothing.

At first, he'd tried to focus on simple tasks that he could do in his head, just to keep him from getting bored (or mad). He'd made an outline for that English essay that they'd all been supposed to write, sometimes pausing to get water from the pump, or eating slimy old disgusting beans from a can he'd found. The it'd become too hot outside in the desert, and so when he'd been forced inside he'd tried to solve the homework Mr. Clarke had assigned them, all in his mind, trying to sway his minds away from that unholy trapdoor in the middle of the room. Trouble was, though, that by then he could barely remember who Mr. Clarke even *was*, much less why he should give homework assignments. Instead, then he'd tried to draw, outside, in the sand of the desert because he lacked both paper and

pen, then, and almost suffered a heatstroke.

Suddenly such thoughts were cut short. Still hidden behind his planks, Will could hear boots stepping into the single-room house. The gunslinger. The floor was old and wooden, and every step of the man produced a loud, sinister sort of *thump*. Will could feel his whole body tense up, every inch of every fiber in every muscle of his being straining to keep him still.

He could hear the unwelcome intruder walk around the room. The *gunslinger*. He'd gotten barely one look at the man, but there could be no doubt about what he was. The words *western* and *movie* and *Clint Eastwood* floated through his mind, vainly seeking for connections that Will knew were no longer there, connections that had faded away when he'd been drawn and spit out here, wherever *here* was.

Will tried to think, because maybe then the urge to shiver and scream would go away. He thought, *this man there, who is he?* And of course the answer to that was *the gunslinger*, but he hardly found that helpful. A little desperate, he turned the word over in his mind, considered the taste and shape of it. *Gunslinger*. *Gunslinger*. He remembered that Lucas used to have a sling which he'd called a wrist-rocket, and ...

... and he remembered a gun, too. He'd held it himself, shaking wildly, the night he'd been ... well, there did not seem to be a better way to put it: The night he'd been *drawn*. Drawn away from this previous life of his that was already fading away quickly from his memory, and deposited at this house here, right in the middle of a desert that was straight out of a ... out of a DnD campaign. Yeah, sure! This was exactly the sort of landscape that Mike (or had it been Dustin?) would describe to them in hushed tones while they were out on the trail, it fit to a T ... Suddenly Will remembered that yes, it must've been Mike who told the stories, because then Dustin would complain *Shit we'll all die of thirst!* and so it could not also have been Dustin who'd told the description in the first place.

Yes, he remembered the gun all right. The old and slightly rusted thing that Lonnie (who was Lonnie? Will thought he should know, but didn't, not quite) said he went hunting with, though Will secretly suspected that'd only ever been boasting with nothing behind the

smoke to show for it.

Will remembered the box with bullets that he'd hastened to open, remembered his hands shaking in terror then just as they shook in terror now, with the gunslinger walking around in the room. He saw it clear before his eyes; how he'd fumbled to get them into the barrel, how some of the bullets had tumbled to the ground with loud, audible *clinks*. The sound of closing and loading the gun still rang in his ears, and he remembered how he'd stood there, then, goosebumps covered in the cold sweat of terror, waiting for the inevitable and not even registering how the lights had grown brighter until he'd been blinded completely, and then he'd been *drawn* ...

"You're covered, you whore-son. Hands up, you can't hide from ..."

The voice was hard, and though its steel quickly ebbed away to nothing once the man belonging to it steppedd around the planks that'd done so poor a job of hiding Will, Will did as asked without question, without even a questioning *thought*.

Only then, with his hands high up, did he actually see the man to match the command of the voice. It surprised him beyond measure, but Will was almost disappointed. Take any studio in Hollywood and send this man in for an audition, and he'd probably get nothing to show for it but a slip of paper that said *promising, but you look too much like you'd die any second, sir*. And there was nothing of the expected look of cool, deadly and detached determination, either; instead, the gunslinger's face was seemed the very embodiment of confusion, or maybe amazement. Perhaps even of fear.

It was almost less of a surprise when the man doubled over, apparently in shock, and fell to the ground.

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Even with the gunslinger asleep, it still took Will a while before he felt safe enough to move. Then his first thought was to run outside

and away, into the desert, before he remembered that that was hardly an option. Where would he go? He knew nothing of this world (and he *was* certain that this was another world, somehow, and that he hadn't just been transported into the deep depths of the Atacama or the Sahara but to somewhere else entirely).

Instead, then, he took his time in standing up. Slowly, careful so he wouldn't wake the man he stepped closer to the stranger and considered him. His hair might not be gray, his face not in yet thrown into the wrinkles of age, but the gunslinger's face still seemed impossibly old. He'd worn a hat of the sort that cowboys wear, and clothes to go with it, but those, too, seemed faded almost into obscurity. Not ripped or in tatters or anything, just ... *worn. Old.* His lips were cracked. Dehydration, Will imagined, and felt safer at the knowledge that whatever he had to deal with here seemed, at least, to be a human.

Around the man's shoulder he'd slung an old bag made from leather. His belt was an array of bullets, and finally on that gun-belt Will got a glimpse of the largest and most ancient pair of revolvers he'd ever set his eyes on (and ever *would* set his eyes on, he thought).

With only a slight hesitation — his fear had all but disintegrated by now — he knelt down and inspected one of them further. The gun was large, more than twice the length of Will's hand, and though the metal wasn't rusted it still had an air of astonishing age to it. The grips were wood and looked like they were newer than the rest of the gun, but not by much. It was ... well, Will supposed it was either the gun of a hero or a devil, but never of something in-between. Certainly not the gun of a tyrannic father who made his sons (*sons?* Had Lonnie perchance been his father?) shoot helpless rabbits in a fury. It seemed like it should belong to a knight, if knights had carried guns instead of swords.

He stood up again, and went outside to the water pump. He pressed the button, and drank deep when it splashed out the gurgling pipe.

*Castle Byers*, it suddenly popped into his head. *Castle Byers. All friends welcome.*

He could barely remember what Castle Byers was, but he still knew

that *Byers* was part of his name. At least he knew that. The thought let him smile, the nostalgic, sour smile of an old man who remembers something near-insignificant from his youth. Except, of course, that he barely counted twelve years, if at all.

And if *Byers* was part of his name, well, then ... he guessed that, whatever it'd been before, *Castle Byers*, was now a house standing alone in the middle of a desert, with an old, rusty water pump right next to it.

*All friends welcome.*

Will considered that. There was no way for him to be sure if the man who'd passed out was a friend. He'd shouted at him to get his hands up, true, but somehow Will felt like he knew it wasn't *he* for whom these words had been, that the gunslinger had expected someone else to be there ...

There was an old tin can still lying next to the pump, from when he'd eaten those horrible beans, which he now took and filled to the brim with water. Then he carried it inside the house, careful not to spill a drop.

He set it down next to his guest, then rolled the man onto his back. He grabbed the can again, suddenly unsure. *Castle Byers. All friends welcome*, he told himself. But was this man a friend?

*Only one way to find out.*

And with that, Will Byers slowly poured water out over the man's mouth.

Even though Will knew what he was doing, he still gave a start when the man woke with a cough and sprinkled water on Will's hands, and the floor around the two. Then the gunslinger noticed the water on his face and began to suck it in as much as he could. Though he seemed disorientated he found the tin can which was still half-filled with oily water with ease, but the man's face strained in effort as he heaved himself in a halfway-upwards position. And even in this weak state, Will could've sworn that the man's grip was still strong enough to add another dent to the already numerous imperfections of the

little tin water can.

The gunslinger grabbed it like a starving man — which he probably was, Will considered — and downed half of it in one go. He grimaced as he swallowed, and it looked to Will like the few drops that he'd spilled on his face were sucked up as if the man's skin was a dry sponge, that'd only dimly heard of water before. Then, when he'd set it down again, did the man finally take a hushed look around himself, his face full of uncertainties.

Will felt he should say something. *Castle Byers. All friends welcome.* So far, at least, the man hadn't killed him. And it wasn't like it was likely that anyone else'd come by anytime soon.

"Would you like something to eat, sir?" He only had slimy old beans that left a disgusting taste with every swallow, but Will guessed even that was still preferable to starving.

"Not yet," came the answer, short, gruff, and a little unfriendly if not entirely unkindly. The man's voice, Will thought, was much like the gunslinger himself: old, precise, and with the air of a power and might that was right now sadly out of order, try again later.

As if something'd just occurred to him, the gunslinger suddenly stared Will straight into the eye. "Who are you, boy?" The man's stare seemed to nail Will in place, seemed to pierce straight through his eyes and brain to the back of his skull.

"I'm William Byers," Will answered, before quickly adding "but you can call me Will if you like." Apart from the occasional teacher, only Lonnie had ever really called him *William*, and even if Will didn't really remember who Lonnie'd been he remembered that he hadn't liked the man, nor the names he'd called him.

The gunslinger nodded, curtly. Will wondered if he'd offer his own name in return, but he didn't. Madly, some part of his brain told him *you've just found a side-quest: find out the gunslinger's real name.* Stupid. What was he supposed to do with *side-quests* when he didn't even know what the *main* one was?

Meanwhile, the gunslinger drank the rest of the water from the can.

“I can get more if you want,” Will offered him. His guest seemed to have regained his senses somewhat, but even so it still took a moment before the man gave another curt nod.

Will stood up and turned to walk outside to the pump. Halfway to the door he became aware that the gunslinger had stood up as well and was following him, moving with such a quietness that he hadn’t even noticed at first. That unsettled him, slightly, and suddenly he imagined this whole thing as a tale, told in Mike’s voice. Will shook his head, and stepped outside, where the brutal intensity of the sun’s burn almost sent him into shock.

As he put the tin can down beneath the pipe and pressed the button for the second time within an hour, Will still thought about Mike’s voice. Had this been a game of DnD, Mike would’ve given them a quest by now, Will figured. Well, fat luck then, because Will didn’t have one. Except ... maybe the gunslinger had one. Point in fact, Will was pretty sure he already knew what it was.

“Are you after the other?” he asked, and felt his voice suddenly becoming smaller than usual. It would’ve been smaller still, had he not been forced to be louder, at least, then the water streaming out the pump.

Like a snake or some other predator, the gunslinger whipped his head around, and for the first time since he’d fallen over from dehydration Will felt that this age-old stare truly *saw* him. It’d nailed him right in place before, true, but even then it’d been more like the gunslinger stared through him into the distance. Now, though ... now the man saw *him*, in a way that looked as if he tried to read Will’s mind.

“What other?” The question was as his first had been; short, curt, and to the point.

“The ...” Will hesitated. “The dark man. Dressed like a priest.” Even in the unforgiving burn of the desert sun, he felt like he was going to shiver when he recalled that dreadful night when the man had passed by, like an all-powerful shadow in the night. Had he not so clearly worn the shape of a man, Will might’ve simply called him *the shadow monster* and be done with it, but somehow the creature’s human body made it even worse.



“A priest?” It occurred to Will then that maybe in the gunslinger’s world, priests were dressed differently. Or maybe they just didn’t exist at all. Who could know?

“Black robes,” he clarified. “He ... it was like ...” Will considered for a moment if he should really continued. “It was almost as if he wasn’t human. More like ... a shadow. In the night. I hid while he walked past.”

The gunslinger never said a word to this, but one look from his face was enough and Will knew.

With a start, the pump gave in and the can was filled. Will handed it to the gunslinger, who drank deep.

“There’s a can of beans, inside,” Will told the man. “They don’t taste well, and I can’t really make a fire, but ...”

When the gunslinger set the can down he said he had flint and stone enough, then turned to walk back inside.

Will was quicker though, and dashed to the door before the man, weakened as he still was from the desert and now the sudden influx of water, could’ve ever hoped to reach it. The gunslinger stopped in front of him, as if waiting for him to let him through the door.

“Are you a friend?” Will asked him. “Because this house, I call it Castle Byers. I think that used to be someplace else, before I died, but now it’s here. Anyways, in Castle Byers, all friends are welcome. So, are you? A friend?”

Again, the gunslinger looked Will dead in the eye, though he took his time before offering an answer. “I not sure about that, yet,” he said at last. The stare alone could’ve driven Will mad, but at least he felt the man had told the truth.

“You should be, you know,” Will told him, and, impossibly, the gunslinger gave a short flash of a smile. Even more impossibly, that smile somehow reminded Will of Mike’s, and of ...

*He hasn’t given you an answer yet,* Will reminded himself before he could step away from the door.

"I'm not," the gunslinger persisted, then added as if in afterthought, "There'll be water if God wills it."

"There's water from the pump," Will told him.

Again, the gunslinger gave that short flash of a smile, and again that somehow reminded Will of a boy named Mike. He didn't know why, and it drove him mad.

"I guess I'm a friend, then," was the gunslinger's conclusion. "For the while, at least."

Now Will smiled, too, and let the man step inside the house where they shared a can of slimy old beans heated over a small fire, which, amazingly, made them even worse.

Still, there was two of them now, Will considered, and that made him smile again. Better not be alone out in the desert.

*Castle Byers*, he thought, *All friends welcome*.

### **Author's Note:**

I'm not really sure if this is going anywhere (and if so, then where). Maybe I'll think of something. Maybe *you'll* think of something and tell me in the comments, or even write it yourself. I'm only sure that I can't really continue this on forever, 'cause, well ... the *Dark Tower* is fucking much too *long*, for this kind of an AU at least. I know I've categorized this as a multi-chapter work, but if I'm being honest I'm not yet sure about that. Or at least, I don't have an outline for anything, and not even vague ideas.

Maybe this is the next cycle of Roland's quest, after the novels? (or a previous cycle, given that he doesn't have the Horn of Arthur Eld? Though if so, I'm worried about how Will would fare ...)

Well, in any case, I hope you liked reading this.